

Professional Development in Education 14.4 (2017) Editorial

Sue Swaffield

Reframing views, lifting up voices, and ensuring everyone is visible?

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, the Emily Hargroves Fisher Professor of Education at Harvard, gave one of the Distinguished Lectures at the recent annual meeting of the American Education Research Association. It was one of the most powerful and eloquent lectures I have ever had the privilege of listening to. Like many people I already admired Lawrence-Lightfoot's widely acclaimed writing, and her delivery of the lecture - her voice, her intonation, her presence, her passion - all heightened the message and the experience. In the brief summary of the lecture below I use some of her wonderful words and phrases, but apologise that I cannot do justice to her expressiveness and for any misrepresentation.

The lecture was titled '*“Let the Great Brown River Smile.” Liberating Frames and Educational Discourses: On View, Voice and Visibility*'.

Lawrence-Lightfoot began by acknowledging our contemporary troubled times, saying that the symbolism and reality of the current state of the world can make us feel helpless, vulnerable, and victimised, and encouraging us to respond with imagination, attention and rigour. Lawrence-Lightfoot stated that as educators we have felt a particular challenge and responsibility to take care of young people – to be in effect 'society's public adults'.

Lawrence-Lightfoot then introduced the three themes in the title of her lecture – View, Voice and Visibility, and began by claiming that researchers, educators and policymakers have retreated to a view of achievement that is narrow and monolithic. She therefore called for a reframing of view, particularly on goodness. Her argument was that the relentless scrutiny of failure is distorting, and the documentation of pathology often bleeds into blaming the victim. Instead we should be asking 'what is good?' – the very approach she took in her award-winning 1983 book '*The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*'. Portraiture (the methodological approach Lawrence-Lightfoot pioneered) is one way of changing perspective, and by providing accounts that give voice to the voiceless links to the second of the lecture's themes.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot too many of the conversations about schools are reductionist and rhetorical, and we should be challenging the dynamics and the language of much educational discourse. She urged us to dismantle the hierarchy between the thinkers and the doers, to bridge the divide between theory and practice, and to lift up our voices to create a symmetry of perspectives and different sources.

Visibility, the third theme, is about feeling seen, acknowledged and worthy. Education must acknowledge differences – in race, ethnicity and sexual orientation –

while working against tokenism. Lawrence-Lightfoot said that the real challenges of diversity are complex and subtle, and reside in the substance and texture of discourse. She declared herself terrified by the retreat from the social commitment fought so hard for in the last decades, and said that we will have to argue that pluralism brings a richness and a vitality that closed communities can never know. She spoke of cutting through the layers of hard distorted glass and seeing the full humanity of our research subjects. She sees diversity as a strength and advocated working towards its realization in the institutions and communities we inhabit.

The lecture was a call to reframe our view, to lift up our voices, and to attend to the imperative that everyone is visible. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot urged us to get busy - with grit and grace.

The three 'Vs' – View, Voice and Visibility – are commendable signposts for educative work and offer interesting lenses through which to consider the articles in this issue of *Professional Development in Education* (PDiE). As to be expected in an international journal we have articles representing views from around the world – Europe, the United States of America, the Middle East and Australasia. Typically the authors examined approaches to professional learning to understand strengths and identify ways of making the good even better. The articles give voice to many research participants including school teachers and leaders, further education tutors, local authority officers, university administrators, teacher educators and academics, nurses and physicians, and police community support officers. The journal is concerned with professional learning and development in its widest sense including in a variety of contexts, and in order to emphasise the diversity of contributions that PDiE welcomes, articles reporting research in possibly less familiar settings are presented first.

The first article concerns a professional development programme in England designed to enable uniformed civilian members of police support staff to take on the role of school link officers. Thomas and Trotman used a mixed-methods case study to gather data from various stake-holders about the PD programme that had been designed to support participants' in-school work with young people. School based mentoring, reflection, and professional recognition for undertaking a small scale action research project were particularly positive features, while inter-professional working among the police, schools and higher education could be further enhanced.

The next article, by Vähäsantanen and colleagues, reported an arts-based identity coaching programme for professionals working in health care (a hospital) and education (a university) in Finland. Post-programme interviews were conducted with 49 of the participating nurses, physicians, academics and administrative personnel to elicit the kinds of learning outcomes the participants perceived. The authors report rich learning in terms of professional self, relationships and competencies, and make the case that in fields such as health and education professional learning should be based on professional identity and agency.

Bain and colleagues focus on how a national school/university partnership programme for teacher professional learning was implemented by teachers, schools, local government local managers and university staff. The authors trace the decisions shaping action from the national recommendations, through the national implementation board and the regional partnership group to local partners in the north of Scotland. They draw attention to the ephemeral nature of national priorities contrasting with the longer-term sustained commitment to collaboration to enhance learning found at the local level.

The four authors of the next article are from four European countries: The Netherlands; the UK; Norway and Belgium. They set out to learn more about professional learning across national boundaries by studying their own learning processes while involved in an international forum focused on the professional learning of teacher educators. Lunenberg and colleagues carried out an embedded case study using a variety of data including personal narratives, and written accounts of activities. They revealed an interplay between their own individual learning and their support of each other, and the reciprocal effect of working nationally at the same time as internationally.

There is a change of scale in the next article: rather than four researchers studying their own learning, O’Leary and Wood used a survey to gather views about lesson observation from nearly 4000 tutors and managers working in Further Education colleges in England, then conducted interviews or focus groups with 30 staff. Extensive quotations give voice to a range of participants and really capture the complexity of classrooms and teachers’ work. Graded lesson observations within a performativity context were heavily criticised for a number of reasons, not least the attendant labeling and oversimplification.

17 teachers of English as a Foreign Language in two primary schools in Qatar were studied by Chaaban to examine their changes in beliefs and practices as a result of participating in a school-based support programme. Using pre and post surveys, along with data from observations and interviews, Chaaban identified strengths of the programme, difficulties faced by the teachers when they tried to apply what they had learned in their classrooms, and participants’ suggestions for improvement.

The following article comes from another international team of researchers, this time representing Australia, Norway, Cyprus and New Zealand. Flückiger and her co-authors show that group coaching facilitates leadership learning by offering participants multiple perspectives on resolving dilemmas. Participants were school leaders who engaged in group sessions following a protocol, sometimes as coachees other times as coaches. Data were gathered from interviews and observations.

Next come two articles from the USA, both concerned with the professional development of school teachers. Derrington and Kirk focus on the strategies that 28 principals in the state of Tennessee reported using to facilitate teacher development within a state-mandated evaluation system. Using interviews the authors elicited the principals’ views about teacher learning: they most frequently mentioned learner-

centred, job-embedded professional development; and clearly wanted teachers to succeed in the new evaluation system.

The study by Trust and Horrocks also focused on teachers' learning, but in this case through their engagement in blended learning communities. Interviews were conducted with 26 teachers, thus listening to their voices rather than those of their principals. The participants really appreciated the diverse learning experiences available through the networked community although some felt overwhelmed by the quantity of information and multiple sites to explore. Trust and Horrocks acknowledge the limitations arising from data in the form of self-report from self-selected respondents who were likely to be particularly positive about the programme, but advocate continuing research into teacher learning through blended learning communities as they become more prevalent.

The final full article in this issue also focuses on teacher learning, this time through a small scale observational study in Australia. Mansfield and Thompson studied instructional rounds – an approach in which a network of teachers uses an observation protocol to improve their practice. Seven teachers from three small primary schools took part in the programme over the course of a year; they regularly wrote short reflections, and at the end were interviewed about their experiences and learning. Benefits and challenges were identified, along with unanswered questions about long-term impact on student learning and the sustainability of a model that seems to require external support.

The research note by Gaumer Erickson and colleagues that completes this issue takes us back to the USA and the perennial issue of measuring the quality of professional development training. A checklist was devised through a review of literature, and then tested at 99 diverse trainings across four states. The final checklist could be used as a planning framework, an evaluation tool, and to initiate dialogue between evaluators and trainers.

This issue includes a variety of articles that take different views, include a range of perspectives and sources, and give voice to many participants. Many of them are based on partnerships between 'thinkers' and 'doers', and do bridge theory and practice. There is however absolutely no room to be complacent, either as researchers or journal editors. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's call to reframe views, lift up voices and ensure everyone is visible, poses crucial challenges to which we as educators ('society's public adults') should respond – with grit and grace.